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SUBJECT: KARNATAKA GOVERNOR WANTS STATE ELECTIONS BY MAY 28

REFS: 07 CHENNAI 689 and previous

11. (U) Karnataka Governor Rameshwar Thakur, speaking to reporters in Bangalore on January 23, said that he wants to see state elections happen before May 28. (Thakur has administered the state since the imposition of "President's Rule" in November, when the state's legislature demonstrated that it was unable to form a viable government -- see reftels.) Thakur also reminded the press that May 28 will mark six months of President's Rule, the legal limit. Although though the national parliament can renew the mandate, Thakur said that he intends to end President's Rule by that date.

Voter registration problems

12. (U) Press reports have also highlighted problems with voter registration in Karnataka, a process that has been underway for several months. The new voter rolls reportedly contain more than two million new voters. Politicians from across the political spectrum have alleged that the new list contains names of people that do not exist. Karnataka's chief electoral officer has instructed his working-level officials to require new voters to fill out "Form 6," which is required of new registered voters. Some of these officials have told journalists that it will be nigh impossible to chase down all of the new registered voters and that they will be unlikely to get even 80,000 of them to fill in Form 6.

The mess behind the mess

13. (SBU) A senior assistant to Governor Thakur told us that Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil had instructed the Governor to complete the electoral registration process by mid-February. The assistant also told us that Karnataka's electoral commission has few resources of its own and had to rely on a motley gaggle of seconded low-level bureaucrats, teachers, and health workers to complete the voter registration process. These workers received no extra compensation for this task, were poorly motivated, and were often harassed by local politicians to ensure that the poll workers focused on neighborhoods where the politicians had the most supporters. These poll workers therefore had little incentive to make sure that the job was done properly the first time and are reluctant to head back out again to complete the tedious task of getting the new registered voters to fill out Form 6.

HOPPER